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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAMAKO 001365

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SUBJECT: READOUT OF MEETINGS BETWEEN PRESIDENTS TOURE AND  
BOUTEFLIKA

REF: BAMAKO 01015

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) The president of the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC), Iyad ag Ghali, told the Embassy on November 28 that the November 24-25 meetings between President Toure and the Algerian President Bouteflika produced no breakthroughs in the standoff between Mali and the Tuareg bandit Ibrahim Bahanga. Ag Ghali, who participated in the talks in Algiers, described the situation as somewhat better but said negotiations were bogged down over the positioning of Malian military units and the involvement of too many actors. In short, the positions of the two sides have remained largely unchanged since the crisis began in August, with President Toure and Bahanga unable to reconcile demands for prerequisite steps.

2.(C) Algeria reportedly presented President Toure upon his arrival in Algiers with a plan that envisaged the liberation of Bahanga's hostages in return for official recognition of a truce by the Malian government. Ag Ghali said that President Toure rejected this proposal and insisted on the unilateral release of the hostages as a prerequisite for subsequent negotiations. Ag Ghali confirmed that President Toure did not meet with Bahanga while in Algiers but said Bahanga met with Kafougouna Kone, the Malian Minister of Territorial Administration and a close confidant of President Toure.

3.(C) With no clear resolution to the crisis on the horizon, ag Ghali said Algeria and Tuareg leaders were looking for an alternative formula acceptable to both sides. Unfortunately, the only aspect of this formula that has apparently been identified is the continued role of Algeria as mediator. Ag Ghali accompanied Bahanga to Tripoli prior to the meetings in Algiers, but said that while Qadhafi pressured Bahanga to release the hostages, Libya was disinclined to become involved. Ag Ghali said that Bahanga would continue to rely on the Algerians as mediators but only up to a point. If nothing happens, said ag Ghali, "then we will see what we will do."

4.(C) Ag Ghali repeatedly referred to Bahanga's position, whether intentionally or not, as "our" position, as though Bahanga's demands were shared by ag Ghali and the ADC. Ag Ghali noted that Bahanga regards the 36 Malian soldiers he is holding not as hostages but as prisoners of war captured on the field of battle. Ag Ghali claimed that he had not asked Bahanga where the hostages were located as he preferred to avoid such direct questions. He also maintained that Bahanga

still knows the location of all of the unexploded land mines he planted around Tinzawaten. A member of President Toure's entourage, however, told the Embassy on November 28 that Mali believed local citizens in Tinzawaten were in the process of re-locating some of the mines.

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Comment: Algerian Mediation Fails to Deliver, Again  
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5.(C) Although ag Ghali and other Tuareg leaders continue to profess optimism over the eventual liberation of the hostages, the positions of the Malian government and Bahanga seem to be growing more entrenched by the day. The meetings in Algiers do not appear to have produced any new developments and may have reinforced Mali's frustration with its neighbor to the north. President Toure and members of his entourage have repeatedly stated that Mali believes the Algerian security services in southern Mali are operating outside of Bouteflika's control (reftel). One of President Toure's confidants told the Embassy on November 28 that President Toure would not ask Algeria to simply arrest Bahanga - who continues to circulate freely within Algeria - because Bouteflika was "lucid only five days per month" and lacked the power to direct his security services to take Bahanga into custody.  
McCulley